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EL FARSI THE BARBER

MOHAMMED the Syrian had been talking fully an hour, and had related a number of stories

By D. E. S. Fields the wood that was on the back of thy donkey?' asked the illustrious monarch, yawning.

to his attentive hearers. It was at the entrance of a gourbi, before a pile of ashes which hid dying embers left from the recent fire of brush. The night was damp, and from the ground arose heavenward a mingled odor of earth, musk, and Alpine plants.

Stretched on the ground, rolled up in a burnoose of goat hair which protects from cold at night and heat in the day, my eyes followed in the horizon the moving flames of a fire. For sometime I ceased to hear the storyteller; then he began to sing. It was a slow and languishing melody, constantly repeated, accompanied by the confused cadence of an invisible tomtom, in which a fifteen-year-old girl, Maileh, wept over her absent lover, who had gone toward the desert and failed to return.

But the singer stopped; he drew from his neighbor's narghile a smelling puff, and as I rose asked me to listen to him a moment more.
"Thou art sad, sahib," said he. "Is it that

Maileh's misfortune has moved thy heart and thoughts? I am going to tell thee a story well known in Syria, my country, which will chase the clouds that have darkened thy eyes. Listen!"

I settled myself in an easy position, hearing again in the silence that preceded the first words of my storyteller the far away barking of a dog and the murmur of whispering among the group of listeners Then all was still, and Mohammed began thus:

PORMERLY, in the reign of a master just but severe, whose reputation stood like a halo above the immense Mussulman Empire, lived a well known barber, noted for his obstinate temper and his vanity. He lived in a small town, near the capital of the Empire. His name was El Farsi. Son of a camel driver whose life had been spent in driving his beast from one town to another without accumulating a fortune, he had at last settled down in a well patronized shop, where he sold leeches and at the same time shaved the skulls and cheeks of the most respectable citizens He renown that had spread over the white walls of the small city.

"One day, as he was standing before the door of his shop, a donkey driver passed him, with his beast heavily loaded with two bundles

of firewood.
"The man was known to him; so he called. 'Hey, old sage Ahmed! Good luck to thee!' "'Good-morning, barber,' answered the man.
'Is it thee who will take my wood to-day?'

'I am willing to,' said the barber, and he lookest quite happy.' examined the merchandise, reflected a moment, and asked, with a malicious smile, 'How much dost thou want for all the wood I see on thy

'Well,' said the donkey driver, 'I shall be satisfied to have ten copper pieces; for I long to go back to my village.

'All right,' loudly said El Farsi, 'ten copper pieces for all the wood I see on thy ass! I agree; unload!'

Ahmed untied the old ropes that bound the firewood and threw it down. But immediately the barber, seizing the pack saddle that had fallen at the same time, carried it into his shop. and ordered his servant to bring the wood.

The donkey driver, not understanding this action on the part of the barber, looked perplexedly from the bald back of his animal to the mocking face of the man as he received the ten copper pieces.

But thou hast taken my pack saddle! exclaimed he.

"'Well, is it not made of wood, and hast thou not sold all the wood that was on thy

"'By the holy name of Allah, barber, thou art a rascal! The pack saddle alone is worth

three times more.'
"'I believe it,' retorted El Farsi; 'but it was a bargain. I gave you the price agreed upon.' And all that the poor donkey driver could say would not persuade the other to give back the

"However, it was getting late and the poor "How is that, old ruffian? Thou verifield had to decide. The barber, a little like to have thy donkey shaved by me? feared for his bad tongue, had gathered all the jokers on his side, who laughed at Ahmed's misfortune and his woebegone face.

AT last he left the place, leading his animal behind him. Arriving at the shop of a public writer, he told the man of his adventure and asked what he should do.

'Go and ask audience of the kadi,' answered

the public counsellor at law.
"He went there, and the judge propounded

only one question.
"Thou hadst sold all the wood that was on

thy beast?"

Yes. master,' answered Ahmed. "'Well, then the barber is right and the

bargain is regular. Go away."
"He went away, unable to understand that kind of justice, and concluding that the kadi was as much of a rascal as the barber. He

went back to the public writer, who said: 'The Sultan, the Master's master on our earth, is a good man. Go and see him; I will write thee a petition. He alone can have thy goods restored to thee.

"He took the petition, went to the palace, and was ushered before the Prince of Believers. He knelt before the great man, and ex-

claimed:
"'O Prince just and good, thy name has spread all over thy Empire like a veil that lights us! I beseech thee—' and he related his story, his forehead on the ground, while a chamberlain handed the petition to the Prince

So, then, ass driver, thou hadst sold all the furious barking of watchdogs.

monarch, yawning. "'Yes, Prince,' said Ahmed.

"'Well, thou canst go away; the barber was

The ass driver was beginning to doubt himself now. The veil of justice and light of the Empire had condemned him also. Could it be that he was really wrong? Had he been cheated by his own simplicity, and had the barber been more clever than dishonest?

SUCH were the reflections of the unhappy fellow as he withdrew from the presence of the Prince. But what would his wife say, who was waiting for him in the next village? Surely she would beat him. And he lamented, wept, in a corner of the steps leading to the palace.

"Just then a beggar happened to pass that way. On his head he had a green turban as a mark of holiness: his long white beard which fell on his chest from a pale and sweet face indicated his respectability, and his eyes and manners gave one confidence. He drew near the man, leaning on a knotted staff, and, squatting before him, asked gently:

A misfortune has entered thy house, my brother. Wilt thou trust me? I am Moham-

med-el-Haji.

Then the donkey driver lifted up his head and again repeated his story; he wept, and finally was near doubting divine justice after having been denied the human. "Oh, my brother, what wert thou going to

say?' interrupted the old man, coming nearer. 'Go back again and see the barber; for he was right, unhappily; but listen to me.

And in a whisper he gave him a good piece

Suddenly the face of the man brightened. He rose with haste, thanked the beggar warmly, emptied almost his purse in his alms box, embraced him, and returned to the town. Soon he arrived before the public writer, who

exclaimed, as soon as he saw him.
"'Holloa, old man! Hast thou obtained

"'Alas!' answered the ass driver, "justice is had even acquired in his delicate profession a not to be found in this world, and the Prophet's precepts are rarely followed. But keep my ass for a little while. I am going to the marketplace, and will soon come back.

> HE soon was again before the barber's house. The man was leaning against his door, and when he saw his victim he began laughing.

'Well,' thought Ahmed, 'those laugh best who laugh last. I wait my turn!'
"'Here thou art!' said the barber 'Thou

Indeed I am,' answered Ahmed cheerfully. 'I have just met a relative of mine who is going to get married this very day, and my friend and I are going to take him to his handsome bride. But tell me—thou hast a just reputation in thy profession, and I would like that thou shouldst shave us, my friend and me. We must be worthy to be present at the festiva! How much wilt thou charge to shave us both?

You are not among my customers,' said the barber, 'neither thou that I know, nor thy friend that I do not know. However, in com-

my friend and me, observed Ahmed, 'but so be it, it is settled.' And he paid the price rewho had gathered around them. he left the place.

A short time afterward he came back, pulling his donkey, which looked as sad as its master was joyful, and, stopping before the barber, he exclaimed

"'Eh, El Farsi, celebrated barber, time passes! Hurry to thy work! We are waiting

"'And thy friend?' inquired the barber. "'Forsooth! here he is, my friend, my best friend,' and he drew his donkey nearer to him.
"'How is that, old ruffian? Thou wouldst

'That is just what I say, good man. Hast thou not promised to shave us both, my friend and me? Well, as thou saidst in another circumstance, it is a settled bargain,-a regular bargain, as said the kadi after you.

"They went to see the judge again in great pomp; for all the people of the town followed the two parties; but the judge could not say a word, he laughed so much.

"To say nothing is not a judgment, and the barber refused to comply with the request. So they went before the Chief of the Believers.

"'Then, barber, it has been arranged that thou wouldst shave the ass driver and his friend for a small silver piece?' said the illustrious monarch. 'Then the ass driver is right, and thou art going to comply with the conditions of the bargain right here before me!

"He was forced to obey. From the top of the tail to the top of the ears, the hair of Ahmed's best friend fell under the famous razor. Never was such a festival in the small town; for the executions of the Prince's verdicts were ren-

dered in public.
"From that day El Farsi had only fakirs and beggars to shave, and most of the time these did not pay him. So, like his father the camel driver, he never made a fortune. The donkey driver, on the contrary, enjoyed high rank at court for having in one day amused the Prince so much.

Such was Mohammed's Syrian story. After having finished it. he stretched himself on the bare ground, and I departed for my hut amid



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